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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ EXECUTIVE STEERING COMMITTEE, NOV. 23, 2007

Classified By: Economics Minister Counselor Charles P. Ries for reasons
1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On 23 November, Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki, chaired the Baghdad Security Plan (Fardh al Qanoon) FAQ) Executive Steering Committee (I-ESC) of the Government of Iraq (GoI). The Meeting featured an extensive discussion of fraud and poor quality within the Public Distribution System and also again highlighted the need to form a strategy to facilitate the return of Displaced Persons in light of recent security improvements. END SUMMARY.

Increased Pace of T-Wall Removal) Abu Nawas Street to Open

(C) In response to a PM directive from the 16 Nov. I-ESC, Baghdad Commander General Aboud reported on the increased pace of T-wall removal in the city, stating 70% of illegitimate or unnecessary t-walls have been removed from Palestine Street and that the historic Abu Nawas St. would &open tomorrow.8 However, Aboud also stated that both Karkh and Rusafa neighborhoods have significant amounts of T-walls that should be removed given increased security gains. (Note. A significant portion of the T-walls that have closed some Baghdad streets over the past year have been placed by unofficial entities, such as neighborhood groups. End Note).

Chalabi Highlights IDPs While Reporting on Sabah Al-Bour Visit

(C) Ahmed Chalabi, Head of the I-ESC Services Committee, commented on the complex nature of the IDP phenomena he found on his recent visit to Sabah Al-Bour, a north Baghdad suburb. Chalabi noted that roughly 1400 empty houses exist in the suburb, and that the departed now reside in Al Hurriya, whose former residents in turn now live in Al Yarmouk and so on. Chalabi also noted a lack of drinking water caused by area farmers illegally tapping pipes for irrigation and that this issue could be resolved in just a few days if 100 million Iraqi Dinars could be provided for irrigation pumps. No response was given to this request for funds.

GoI Efforts to Facilitate Return of Iraqis from Syria

(C) As part of a widespread discussion on the need to come up with a plan to facilitate returning Displaced Persons, the Minister of State for National Security Affairs noted that an agreement had been reached with the Government of Syria to send 20 buses next week to begin transporting Iraqis who desired to return. The Minister urged that a financial incentive payment be initiated and suggested that Iraq could expect 400 to 500 returnees per week through GoI organized transport. (Comment: The ability of the GoI to formulate and execute a effective IDP strategy remains in serious question. End Comment.)

Sarafiya Bridge Rebuild Progressing Well) Other Key Bridges Inhibited by Contractor Issues

(C) The Minister for Housing and Construction showed a video

on the progress of the Sarafiya Bridge and stated that its progress is 55% complete. However, the Minister highlighted stymied progress on 4 other key bridges resulting in part from a lack of sufficient response to public bid requests. The Minister also complained that she has no authority and that the Council of Ministers is required to authorize many essential contractor selection issues. In response to a comment from Baghdad Governor related to which GoI entity is the most proficient at building bridges, Services Chair Chalabi commented that private sector companies should be looked to as the solution for such activities.

Improving the Quality of PDS Items

(C) In a follow-up to last week's discussion about the poor state of the Public Distribution System, the Minister of Trade stated that his ministry would begin to destroy, rather than distribute expired food stuffs, and then gave a lengthy list of challenges that the systems faces including:

- 3 to 5 PDS drivers being killed daily
- Current law requires the lowest bid be accepted regardless of quality
- The increase in global commodity prices
- Widespread fraud among distributors
- An estimated 40,000 forged ration cards

(C) In response to the Minister of Trade's statement that he would begin a review of who is eligible for rations cards during the next six months, National Security Advisor Muwafuk Rubeiy called for participation from the Ministry of Health in inspecting food quality and asked for a report on which areas in Baghdad are properly receiving the PDS basket of goods.

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